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ABSTRACT

The Occupational Education Administration Project at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale was developed to prepare vocational education administrators. Evaluation of the project was intended to determine the extent to which participation was related to student learning and on-the-job competence after graduation. The project was competency based, with each student's performance evaluated according to a performance portfolio of 159 competencies. Project evaluation showed that this approach to competency-based administrator education was generally successful. However, there are still important questions that must be answered before the author would recommend the complete replacement of an entire traditional program with a pure competency-based curriculum. (Author)

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EVALUATION OF A COMPETENCY BASED EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION PROJECT

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(Note: John conducted the study reported here while a doctoral student at Southern Illinois University in 1976. Ed.)

The Occupational Education Administration Project at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale evolved from a 1971 Illinois Office of Education proposal that called for development of a program to prepare vocational education administrators. The Project was designed during 1972, 8 students were enrolled in 1973, 13 in 1974, 10 in 1975, and 10 in 1976. The developed curriculum is now a joint Vocational Education-Educational Leadership offering giving qualified applicants the option to enroll in a graduate level Occupational Education Administration program. The Project was interdepartmental, being jointly sponsored by the Departments of Vocational Education Studies and Educational Leadership. Dr. Wayne S. Ramp, Professor of Occupational Education, was Director and Dr. James C. Parker, Associate Professor of Educational Administration, was Assistant Director. Both men continue in these positions.

The Project was evaluated during 1976 to determine the extent to which participation was related to student learning and alumni on-the-job competence after graduation. Also examined, to see whether they were associated with student learning, were variables like prior experience and the number of hours a Project Intern received direct supervision. The knowledge resulting from this evaluation and certain particulars about how it was gathered are the subjects of this article.

The Project

The tasks judged to define the Occupational Education Administrator role were identified during a 1972 conference of professors of vocational education and educational administration, public school and college administrators, and Illinois Office of Education staff. The more than 500 tasks suggested by this group were later hand sorted by Project Staff to result in 159 more or less mutually exclusive competency statements. All of the above occurred before the first student was enrolled in 1973.

To be considered for enrollment, a student was required to be employed as a vocational education teacher in a Southern Illinois public school or college and was expected to continue this employment concurrent with

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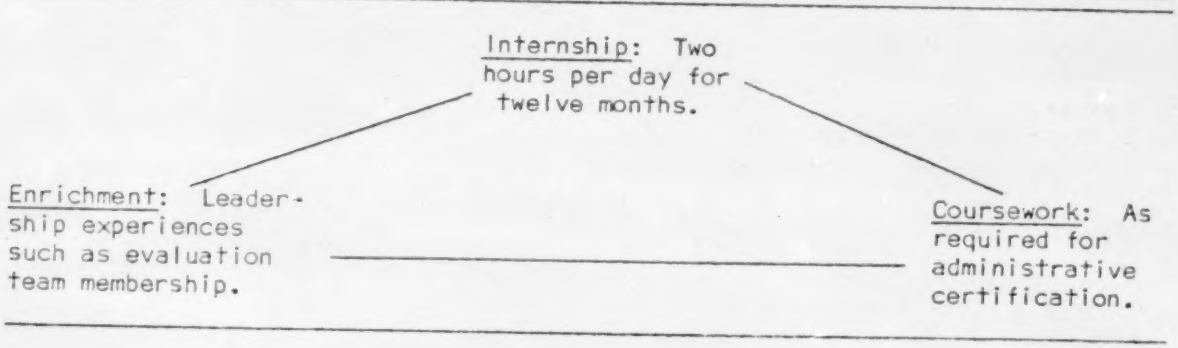
participation in the Project. Each student also was required to furnish a letter from his/her principal, superintendent, or dean indicating that they agreed to sponsor the student in question. A sponsoring administrator would demonstrate commitment to his student by agreeing to provide the release time and to arrange for or provide the personal supervision the student would need to master the 159 competencies while serving as an intern in the administrator's school.

Students who enrolled in the Project engaged in at least three distinct types of learning activities. As illustrated by Figure 1, each served two hours per day as an intern; completed the course-work required for Illinois Level I or Level II administrative certification; and attended weekend seminars, served as a member of an Illinois Office of Education evaluation team, and attended at least one professional meeting. Thirty-one (31) students completed the Project prior to its evaluation in 1976.

Figure 1

A TRIPARTITE PROGRAM


Internship: Two hours per day for twelve months.
Enrichment: Leadership experiences such as evaluation team membership.
Coursework: As required for administrative certification.

The tool which made it possible to field this project was the "Performance Portfolio." Developed during 1972, and provided to each student from then on, the Portfolio listed the 159 competencies and provided an assessment system that enabled individual students to progress at their own rates based upon documented mastery of specific competencies. Initially, the Portfolio incorporated a cognitive rating scale patterned after one developed by McCleary and McIntyre (1972). When it was discovered that many students mastered competencies at the highest point on the rating scale, the system was revised. Later Portfolios incorporated more comprehensive rating scales based upon Krathwohl's (1964) and Bloom's (1956) taxonomies.

Each student's proficiency in each of the 159 competencies was assessed twice--when the student entered the Project and after each competency was mastered. A simple assessment process, taught to students and their cooperating administrators at a workshop, was used. Each student would first indicate his/her accomplishments related to each competency and assign a proficiency level. The student's self-ratings were then reviewed and concurred with or revised by his/her cooperating administrator. The final step was a monthly examination of each student's Portfolio by a University Professor of Educational Administration. A student was judged to have successfully compelted the Project when he/she had: 1) documented proficiency at the "comprehension" level (Bloom, 1956) and "responding" level (Krathwohl, 1964) in 90% (143) of the 159 competencies and had completed all requirements for Illinois Level I or II administrative certification.

Evaluation

Collecting Data

Each student's mastery of the 159 competencies had been monitored and recorded in his/her Portfolio which was kept on file after the student completed the Project. This was the data examined to answer questions about student learning. An organizational climate rating scale based upon Halpin's (1966) work was developed to record Alumni's organizational maintenance success. Each Alumni in an administrative position was mailed two organizational climate rating scales for each of his/her faculty. Each faculty member then rated the climate of the Alumni-administered organization and the climate of the overall school in which they were employed. Completed instruments were returned by mail directly to the Project's Evaluator.

Student Learning

Whether enrollment in an educational program has resulted in student learning is always an important question, and this is even more true of a model like the Occupational Education Administration Project. Student learning was carefully examined.

Students learned a great deal while participating in the Project. Figure 2 shows that the average student gained approximately two cognitive and affective levels and exited with cognitive proficiency at the "application" level and affective proficiency at the "valuing" level in better than 80% of the 159 competencies. Cognitive and affective learning exceeded the minimum standards set by Project Staff, and was also of statistical significance, resulting in the conclusion that participation in the Project caused student learning.

Figure 2

MEDIAN PROFICIENCY GAINED
IN THE 159 COMPETENCIES

	Cognitive[1]	Affective[2]
Pre-test level of proficiency	1.06	1.35
Post-test level of proficiency	3.05	3.18
Levels gained	2.06*	1.66*

[1]Knowledge level = 1.00; comprehension level = 2.00; application level = 3.00; analysis level = 4.00.

[2]Receiving level = 1.00; responding level = 2.00; valuing level = 3.00; organization level = 4.00.

*$P < .05$, Fisher Exact Probability

Prior Experience

Five (5) students were serving as acting vocational directors when they enrolled in the Project. Since many proponents of competency based education advocate giving students credit and/or basing certification on demonstrated mastery of specific skills, how experienced students fared was carefully scrutinized.

Students with the most experience learned significantly less than their nonexperienced colleagues. This was because the most experienced students entered the Project with almost exactly the same average proficiency as non-experienced students had when they exited the Project. It was concluded that experienced students need a way to receive credit without completing the entire program of study and/or advanced courses.

Internship

When the Project began in 1972, there were few Vocational Education Administrators in Southern Illinois. As a result, the Project was forced to place interns with principals and superintendents who did not have vocational education experience or degrees and who in some cases were administering nonvocational programs. Also, there was a wide disparity in the amount of supervision provided by cooperating administrators to their interns. While most provided one (1) to three (3) hours of direct supervision per week to their interns, some administrators devoted a great deal more time to this task. On the other hand, two students apparently received no supervision. These conditions were of concern to Project staff, and their association with student learning was examined.

Whether a cooperating administrator had a vocational or some other baccalaureate degree, was administering a vocational or some other type program, or provided more than three hours of direct supervision to their intern per week made no significant difference in student learning. Interestingly, the two students who received no supervision recorded two of the highest proficiency gains for themselves, an unlikely reality to say the least. It seems that a cooperating administrator's educational background or administrative position are relatively unimportant considerations and that the most significant quality to look for in a cooperating administrator is his/her willingness to sponsor an intern and to insure that the intern receives at least three (3) hours of direct supervision per week.

Organizational Climate

Project Staff believed that the organizational climate of the school in which an Alumni Administrator was employed would be similar to the climate of the Alumni-administered organization because new administrators probably would not be able to significantly influence the prevailing climate. This seemed to be the case. There was a significant positive correlation between the two organizational climates. Even so, Project Alumni did well.

Almost 90% (16 of 18) of the Alumni Administrators maintained an organizational climate at least as open or more open than the climate of their respective schools. It can also be concluded that having consultants from industry teach organizational development, as occurred during 1974, resulted in no measurable advantage since the ability to maintain an open climate was not associated with who taught related competencies.

Figure 3

ORGANIZATIONAL MAINTENANCE

	Alumni Administered Organizations	Overall Schools
Median Organizational Climate[1]	5.00	4.70
Spearman Rank Correlation	+.71*	

[1]Closed climate = 1.00; paternal climate = 2.00; familiar climate = 3.00; controlled climate = 4.00; autonomous climate = 5.00; open climate = 6.00.

*$P < .05$

Conclusions

In general, the approach to competency based administrator education practiced by Southern Illinois University's Occupational Education Administration Project worked. Students learned a great deal while enrolled and almost all Alumni translated the acquired knowledge into competent on-the-job performance. Probably the greatest single gauge of the Project's success has been the employability of its Alumni. When studied, twenty-three (23) of the thirty-one (31) Alumni were in administrative positions and three of these persons had already won their second promotions.

Like most research, this study raised important questions. While it is clear the Project has demonstrated a practical and proven way to prepare educational administrators, there is no evidence that Project Alumni are any more competent than their traditionally prepared colleagues. This needs to be investigated. Also, while the Project's competency based approach provides an ideal way to assess the educational value of prior experience, this potential was not fully utilized. It is time to grant credit for documented prior experience and to test how well this practice holds up in the real world by comparing the on-the-job accomplishments of administrators who were judged qualified for certification using proficiency tests with the on-the-job accomplishments of individuals who completed programs in the traditional way.

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale's competency based project for preparing educational administrators has been judged to be successful. The competency based internship and assessment system seem especially worthy of adoption elsewhere. However, there are still important questions that need to be answered before this author would recommend the complete replacement of an entire traditional program with a pure competency based curriculum or the wholesale certification of administrators using prior experience as the basis for such endorsement.

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